

its own power, government counter-acting government. And the only way of checking power is to disperse that power and to divide it. The Federal Government will, even though it is against their basic interest, always have to learn to check itself. That is the purpose of federalism. That is the reason there are States and national government. That is why we are here week after week, speech after speech, in some ways trying to pick on issues and prod a conscience to realize the real purpose of federalism has the goal of preserving individual liberty and that when we do that, we are doing good, and that for some reason for the national government, the Federal Government, we here in Washington, if we really want to do well for people, if we want to protect people and their rights, we have to learn to try to limit our own power.

That was the goal of the 10th amendment, and it is the goal of this caucus to try to reemphasize all the time that for the rights of people and to preserve people and to help people, the national government has to lose power and share and balance that power with the States.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will be looking forward to the comments of my good colleague from New Jersey.

□ 1615

THE MINIMUM WAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, hard work and perseverance are supposed to be the key to success in America; yet many people who work full time are barely scraping by, earning just \$10,712 per year on the Federal minimum wage, which is now \$5.15 an hour and has been at that level for nearly 10 years.

That is an income, \$10,700, that is \$6,000 below the Federal poverty line for a family of three. That number cheats millions of American families and children out of the chance for basic financial stability every year. It directly contradicts what we often describe as the promise of America, that if you work hard and play by the rules, you have a reasonable chance for a life of some prosperity.

Families are struggling because the buying power of the minimum wage is now at its lowest level in the last 50 years, the last 50 years. But if you look at the changes that families are undergoing just in the last 10 years, here is what you find.

Americans pay 136 percent more to heat their homes and drive their cars than they did 10 years ago when the last minimum wage increase was passed. Health insurance costs have gone up 97 percent during that same period. The cost of a 4-year public university has gone up 77 percent as well.

Families who once lived comfortably on their incomes have been steadily falling out of the middle class and into poverty.

We need to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25 an hour, a level that will really mean something to the parents who are struggling to provide for their children. An increase would boost the wages of 6.6 million workers directly. Another 8.2 million workers earning up to \$1 above the minimum wage would also get a boost due to the so-called "spillover" effects, and that influence would affect the lives of 54,000 people in my home State of Maine.

Despite what some opponents of a wage hike may claim, wages have not risen significantly on their own. They have been eaten away by inflation. Even though the American workforce has increased its productivity by 14 percent over the last 5 years, real wages have gone up by only 2 percent for nonmanagerial workers.

Meanwhile, the average CEO in America makes more than 1,000 times the minimum wage. Americans CEOs earn in one day what most workers earn in a year.

America prides itself on providing opportunity for all. Yet it is clear that the wealth being generated in our economy is only lifting a few. We need an economic plan that allows our citizens, especially our families and our children, to support themselves, educate themselves and continue to achieve and move forward in their lives.

Now, it frankly is an embarrassment that Congress has not addressed the minimum wage issue in almost 10 years, especially in light of the issues that we have found time to address here. Last week, this body gave an estate tax break worth \$280 billion to a few thousand wealthy individuals. For the past year, the Republican leadership has been intent on giving more tax breaks for the wealthiest 1 percent and paying for it with cuts in education, Medicare, and other programs on which Americans depend to maintain their quality of life.

What does it mean to the average American that Congress has raised its own salary over and over again since 1997, but not the minimum wage? Income inequality in this country is a scandal, and this Congress is contributing to making it greater. This is not only bad for the middle class and lower-income Americans in this country, it is bad for our democracy.

Twenty States, including my home State of Maine, and the District of Columbia have already passed increases in the minimum wage. They understand that this is fundamentally an issue of fairness and good economic sense. We need to see this kind of economic leadership at the Federal level as well. We need economic policies that do not leave the majority of our citizens behind.

The Republican leadership does not want a minimum wage increase to

come to a vote here, but eight in 10 Americans do. They support it. Frankly, I wish this Congress would do as much for the average American as it does for corporations and the wealthiest 1 percent.

The minimum wage must allow workers to earn enough to support themselves and their families. \$5.15 is not enough to live on. I hope we can finally start to work together on this issue and enact a long, long overdue increase in the minimum wage.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CONGRESSIONAL CONSTITUTION CAUCUS FOCUS ON TENTH AMENDMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues who came before me this evening to join with us, as we do each Tuesday evening as members of the Congressional Constitution Caucus, to come to the floor to discuss constitutional issues; and this evening to discuss the philosophy, the intent, the foundations of the 10th amendment.

As we discussed, and you have heard already, this amendment really could be said to be the most important amendment in defining what the Founding Fathers' vision of the role of the Federal Government should be.

As stated earlier, the 10th amendment states clearly: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

These historic words, penned by the Founding Fathers, some of the most ingenious political minds of their time or anytime in the world's history, set forth an important principle: that the Federal Government may exercise specific powers that are listed in the Constitution. All you need to do is simply look to it, for example, article I, section 8, and they enumerate the powers that the Federal Government has. It really does not even go on for more than one-and-a-half pages. These are specific powers that the Federal Government has. The others are the remaining powers that are reserved to the States and the people respectively.

Unfortunately, just as the authors of the Constitution have long passed, so too have many of their foundation principles for our government here. Between an ever-expanding Federal Government that for decades now has crept into many other facets of areas once

left to local control, to a Federal judiciary that in many instances completely ignores the intent of Federalism, all resulting in a Federal Government that has become wildly inefficient and just a huge bureaucracy.

So the old concept is really nothing new. It is just that we have lost it over time. Our founders were very clear when they established our system of government. They intended to set up a republic, a republic really, you could almost say, of sovereign states capable of self-governing, but with a small central government with clearly defined and limited powers.

As someone else previously stated, I think the gentleman from Utah, our Constitution can be thought of as a social contract, a contract between the people and their government. We must think of this most important document as a trade between the rights given up between these competing interests. One of the most important interests that we receive then from the Federal Government, as set forth in the Constitution, is the defense of this Republic.

All other inherently government services, the founders were very clear about, were to be contracts between themselves and the local government and contracts between themselves and the State governments. We refer to this as Federalism. The only powers specifically listed in the Constitution are to be administered by the Federal Government. All others are reserved to the people respectively.

Now, earlier last month, I guess it was, we had the discussion on part of this forum to look at one of the legislations that is coming down the pike that will help facilitate this, and that is the sunset commission. We have discussed this in the past, and I will just talk on it briefly right now.

The sunset commission will try to rein in the Federal Government by looking at the agencies and the powers that are already out there. We have suggested that it could be given, maybe even stronger, be given some teeth to it, and one of the ways you do that is to set it up in a BRAC-like format so that when it comes to Congress, it will actually eliminate those ineffective government programs with an up-or-down vote.

Second, and maybe an important change we can make in this to make it even truer, is to do this, and that is to provide provisions in that legislation to say that you will not simply look at the effectiveness of programs or whether programs are duplicative. You will also look at whether or not the programs of the Federal Government are constitutional.

Even if a program is not duplicative of other Federal programs or State programs, even if a Federal program is effective that is being performed right now, the underlying and most seminal question that we must ask ourselves is, do we, as Members of Congress, have the constitutional authority to do what the legislation is asking us to do.

If you put that into something like a sunset commission, that we can review this as each bill and each legislation comes up, each program that is out there, we will be moving in the right direction.

Let me just close by looking at some of the good news that just came out recently, today as a matter of fact, and that is the economic numbers showing that we are actually reining in Federal spending. We are seeing our deficit go down on the Federal level, and I am happy about that.

I am happy that I have been able to join with other members of this delegation and Members of this House to try to rein in the government and try to bring it in the right direction.

We must be awfully careful, though, that when we get the fiscal house of the Federal Government in order that we do not then decide that we will start spending money elsewhere. That would be the wrong direction to take. We have been able to get to where we are simply by putting our house in order as far as spending; we have been able to lower tax rates, allow folks to be on the family budget and not on the Federal budget, to have a more free-market approach.

So I will just say this: that if we close by putting those limitations on the Federal Government to restrict our approach to it and make sure that our philosophy is the same as the Founding Fathers, then we will see that there is both a practical and a fundamental and foundational approach to doing so, and that is a constitutional government.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JONES of North Carolina addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gen-

tleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURGESS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. LYNCH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. LYNCH addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. STUPAK addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Ms. MCKINNEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. MCKINNEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

BLUE DOG COALITION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the 37-member strong, fiscally conservative, Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, I rise this afternoon to discuss our Nation's debt.

As you can see here, Mr. Speaker, today the United States national debt is \$8,413,298,480,959 and some change. If you divide that enormous number by every man, woman and child, including those babies being born today, every United States citizen's share of the national debt comes to the tune of \$28,120.

In the Blue Dog Coalition we have coined the phrase "the debt tax," not to be confused with the death tax or estate tax. The debt tax, D-E-B-T, is one tax that cannot go away until we get our Nation's fiscal house in order.

That is what the Democratic, fiscally conservative, 37-member-strong Blue Dog Coalition is all about trying to restore some commonsense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government. As you walk the halls of Congress and as you walk the halls of the Cannon and the Longworth and the Rayburn House Office Buildings, you will come across these posters which signify that you have walked by the door of an office of one of our fellow Blue Dog members.

We are concerned about this because, Mr. Speaker, from 1998 through 2001, this Nation had a balanced budget, and yet under this administration and this Republican-led Congress, we have seen record budget deficits, the largest deficits ever, ever in our Nation's history.